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Health Department Advising School District on Lead Issue

The Lewis and Clark City-County Health Department is working with Helena School District 1 to respond to the discovery of lead contamination in parts of C.R. Anderson Middle School.

Health officials are drafting guidelines outlining who, if anyone, should consider having a test for lead in the blood. They are also working with St. Peter's Hospital on how to make testing easily available if necessary. The guidelines will be issued by the health department and school district on Wednesday.

“We know there are worried parents out there who are wondering what to do to make sure their children are safe and healthy,” said Melanie Reynolds, health officer for Lewis and Clark County. “We want to assure them that we’ll issue specific health recommendations soon. There’s no medical reason for parents to take immediate action.”

School officials closed C.R. Anderson late Monday after getting results of recent tests for lead in the school basement. Additional sampling is under way to determine whether other parts of the school may have been contaminated. These test results, which are expected Wednesday, will establish the full extent of any potential exposure by students, staff, and visitors.

The health department administers the Lead Education and Abatement Program (LEAP) in East Helena as part of Superfund work there. Staff are using this expertise to draft the guidelines for the school district.

Anyone concerned about lead exposure should contact a health-care provider. For other health-related information, contact LEAP at 457-8583.

Sidebar

Lead is a toxic metal. When a person swallows a lead object or breathes in lead dust, some of it can stay in the body and cause serious health problems. Children six years old and younger are most susceptible.

Lead can affect many parts of the body. Lead generally builds up slowly in the body over time because of repeated lead exposure. Health problems may get worse as the level of lead in the blood gets higher.

There may be no obvious symptoms of lead exposure, but symptoms can include:

- Abdominal pain and cramping
- Aggressive behavior
- Anemia
- Constipation
- Difficulty sleeping
- Headaches
- Irritability
- Low appetite and energy
- Reduced sensations

Anyone concerned about lead exposure should contact a health-care provider.

More information about lead and its impacts on health is available from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency at www2.epa.gov/lead and from the National Institutes of Health at www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/002473.htm .